

NSC BRIEFING

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4 February 1954

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THE CRISIS IN SYRIA

I. Current Situation:

- A. Arrest 12 leaders - 27 January.
- B. Army capable control; even among Druze tribes--heretical Moslems.
- C. Martial law, censorship; full story may not be known.

II. Shishakli Has Been Seriously Weakened:

- A. Failed sell dictatorship to politicians.
- B. Also opposed by radicals, ex-army officers, extremist religious leaders.
- C. No popular support, weak cabinet.
- D. Increasing reliance on police.

III. Implications for United States:

- A. Preoccupied self-preservation.
- B. Unlikely cooperate with West on refugees, Johnston plan, economic aid.
- C. Opposition likely become more extreme. Assassination possible. 9

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4 February 1954

THE CRISIS IN SYRIA

I. Current Situation

- A. In past six months, there has been increasing evidence of various plots to overthrow three-year old military dictatorship of General Shishakli.
- B. Quick arrest on 27 January of 12 opposition leaders apparently nipped in bud one of most serious threats to his regime.
- C. Army, which Shishakli still controls, is capable of handling situation.
- D. Unrest among important Druze tribes of southern Syria. underscores seriousness.
 - 1. Druzes—heretical Moslem sect with about 100,000 adherents in Syria.
- E. Martial law and strict press censorship still in effect.
- F. We may not know full story.

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II. Shishakli has been seriously weakened

- A. Shishakli's major effort, begun last July, to sell his dictatorship to old-line politicians as constitutional regime has failed.
- B. He is now confronted by unyielding opposition from politicians, radicals ex-army officers, extremist religious leaders and Druzes.
- C. Shishakli has no positive popular support--his cabinet is undistinguished and his parliament a rubber-stamp group of opportunists.
- D. Shishakli now must rely increasingly on police repression to maintain his position. Even this is not 100 percent sure as indicated by recent removal of ambitious, powerful chief of police. Defection of part of Army is not impossible.

III. Implication for United States

- A. Shishakli's main preoccupation is preservation of self and regime.

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- B. Will have little opportunity to cooperate with West on resettlement of Arab refugees, on Johnston plan for Jordan River development, on economic aid agreement with US.
- C. Shishakli--lacking popularity of Nagib and character of Ataturk--unlikely to be secure ruler of Syria.
- D. Opposition to him likely to become more extremist, inviting assassination. His weakened position may encourage Arab states to cooperate in attempts to overthrow him.

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